

***NCCIC Is a Service of the Child Care Bureau***

10530 Rosehaven Street, Suite 400 • Fairfax, VA 22030 • Phone: 800-616-2242  
Fax: 800-716-2242 • Email: [info@nccic.org](mailto:info@nccic.org) • Web: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov>

## **SWEETWATER TRANSIT AUTHORITY RESOURCES (STAR)<sup>1</sup>**

### **Description**

*A STAR is born.*

In many rural communities, transportation to child care is often as difficult as finding qualified providers. In rural Wyoming, the Sweetwater Transit Authority Resources (STAR) provides dependable, efficient transportation services to children, adults, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. STAR's coordinated transportation system combines the existing resources of several human service agencies to transport passengers door to door at an affordable rate. Children benefit greatly from the cooperative transportation model. They can travel safely without their parent(s) to child care centers, doctors' appointments, and after-school activities. Approximately one-third of all STAR trips are to and from the county's Child Development Center that provides services for young children with disabilities.

### **Partners**

The following partners support the ongoing operation of STAR:

- Child care centers, senior centers, nursing homes, the housing authority, and human service agencies contract with STAR to provide transportation for their clients.
- Zanetti Bus Lines provides in-kind space for the STAR office.
- Riders pay fees, provide feedback, and adhere to safety protocols.

The Federal Transportation Association and the State of Wyoming provide grant assistance.

### **History and Development**

In the early 1980s, several government agencies in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, provided transportation services for their clients. Some areas in the largely rural county were covered by more than one agency, while others had no access to transportation at all. It was not unusual to see a van from the Agency on Aging

---

<sup>1</sup> Child Care Partnership Project. (1999). *Profiles of Public-Private Partnerships for Child Care Vol.2*. Washington, DC: Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

trailing a bus from the Human Services Agency. "I knew there just had to be a better way to coordinate transportation," said Cindy Johnson, the champion of STAR and the mother of a child who rode a bus to the Child Development Center. It was Cindy's talks with the government agencies and other organizations that provided transportation that planted the seed of the goal of a single transportation system. In 1983, the Child Development Center, with Cindy's assistance, secured a grant from the Federal Transit Authority to purchase buses for a coordinated transportation system. Soon after, the County Commissioners designated STAR as the county's formal transit authority.

At first, partners were reluctant to join STAR. They were uncertain about the efficiency of the new entity, and unwilling to turn over control of their small transportation operations to another operator. In its first 6 months of operation, however, STAR experienced rapid growth, completing 700 to 1000 monthly trips. Such growth is attractive to businesses, and it wasn't long before new partners began to contract with STAR. By collaborating and combining resources, agencies could provide cost-efficient and reliable services to their clients.

STAR now uses a central dispatcher to arrange up to 7,000 rides a month. Over 90% of riders have a regularly scheduled trip, and the remainder book rides a day or two ahead of the needed service. For example, STAR will transport a child round-trip from school to the doctor's office. It transports groups of children from schools or child care centers to libraries, the movies, and other activities. Individual requests cost \$2 each way, and lower rates may be available for larger groups. State agencies or organizations that contract with STAR pay the transit authority directly and provide passes to the riders. Examples of STAR contract holders include a child development center for children with disabilities, a nursing home and senior center, the housing authority, and the welfare-to-work program in the Human Services Agency.

### **Current Activities**

STAR has grown to meet the demand for transportation services, and continues to seek new clients. In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, STAR provided one month of free transportation to the first 10 people in the welfare-to-work program who obtained jobs. This bonus raised awareness about STAR and helped the welfare-to-work program provide incentives for participants.

To maintain high quality, STAR employees receive 3 weeks of training each year, including refresher courses in basic safety and first aid. For example, drivers and aides learn how to work with persons with disabilities, to handle young children, and to administer CPR.

### **Resources**

STAR has funding from more than 28 different sources—state agencies, employers, and community organizations. This diversity in funding creates fiscal stability for

the transit authority as contracts change over time. STAR is the fiscal agent for the county's transportation funds and operates with an annual budget of approximately \$500,000. Contracts with STAR reflect 38% of the annual budget, individual ticket sales bring in 6%, and state and federal funding subsidizes 35%. The remaining 20% comes, from private grants, interest income, and donations.

In 1994 STAR received \$700,000 from the Federal Transit Administration to purchase new buses, radio equipment, and computers. More recently, STAR received \$138,000 from the state of Wyoming to accommodate an expected increase in riders due to a boom in construction. STAR also receives significant, ongoing, in-kind support from Zenatti Bus Company by using the company-provided office space.

## **Results**

In 1999, STAR has grown to include 14 buses, 17 drivers, and 3 administrative staff. Each year the demand for services grows. In 1991, STAR provided 50,112 total trips, and 83,059 in 1996. Approximately one-third of the trips are to the Child Development Center and one-fifth are devoted to transporting individuals to work. The remainder is distributed among other activities such as shopping, medical or social services visits, and recreation. Almost half of all rides are provided to members of the general public, 31% to persons with disabilities, and 23% to the elderly.

STAR, analyzing the economic impact of its services, determined that Sweetwater County and its municipalities save more than \$1.6 million per year, or \$3.50 in benefits for every \$1.00 spent on STAR. STAR documented the benefits of its services by maintaining detailed records of user profiles. The benefits include increased earnings for those who use the service to go to work, and those individuals who can remain at work when their children require transportation. The biggest benefits accrue to the elderly and persons with disabilities who can live at home and now have access to shopping, counseling, and medical services.

## **Sustaining and Replicating**

STAR seeks to sustain quality services through rider feedback and ongoing staff training. Each year, STAR surveys residents to determine transportation needs and customer satisfaction. It also seeks feedback by sponsoring community meetings. When clients asked for more evening and weekend services, STAR extended its operations to include Saturdays.

STAR has been recognized nationally for efficient, affordable transportation service. Cindy Johnson has traveled from Oregon to Washington, D.C., to explain how transportation works in Sweetwater County. The STAR model is one of many being implemented across the country focused on coordinating transportation services, to provide more rides with existing funds. More information on rural transportation options is available through the National Transit Resource Center (1-800-527-8279) and the Rural Information Center (1-800-633-7701).

## Lessons Learned

***More bang for the buck.*** For STAR's transportation model to work, agencies relinquished ownership of their vehicles and their transportation operations to STAR. Initially, some agencies were unwilling to do this, but they joined STAR once they saw how they could successfully provide transportation to more people using fewer funds.

***Business Concepts 101.*** Provide services that are customer driven, and listen to your clients' feedback. Instill pride and active participation in your clients. Charge a fee so that clients put a value on the service—even if it is just a minimal fee.

***Staff training is key.*** Dispatchers are the heart of an effective, coordinated transportation system. They must field the calls, coordinate the routes, and dispatch the drivers. Success or failure hinges on their skills. A well-trained staff increases the chances for success.

---

This information was developed as part of the Child Care Partnership Project, a multi-year technical assistance effort funded by the Child Care Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Partnership Project provided a series of technical assistance resources and materials to support the development and strengthening of public-private partnerships to improve the quality and supply of child care. All of the materials produced under the Child Care Partnership Project are available through the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center at 800-616-2242.